
DECADE ONE
(July 1, 1996 - June 30, 2006)

Because of the current mountain pine beetle infestation, the Department's priority objective in protecting trust assets is to focus primarily on the harvest of at-risk and dead lodgepole pine affected by mountain pine beetle. Addressing forest health issues in other forest vegetation zones will be secondary. Harvest in this decade will be above historic levels and above what would be a sustainable harvest level. The harvesting of dead and dying timber above sustainable levels is consistent with State law and with the Forest Resource Plan Policy No. 4 as dead stands do not contribute to the calculations. (See Section 4 Timber Resource for further discussion.) At the same time, during this first decade, we will be working to improve habitat conditions for the lynx. Timber harvest plans will be carefully developed to meet lynx guidelines as proposed by the Department.

To achieve our objectives for forest health and revenue generation, the following harvest strategies will be followed. In order to capture as much value as possible from the dead and at risk timber, it is expected that more timber harvest will occur during the first half of the decade, and less during the second half. Through monitoring of mountain pine beetle spread and timber market values, harvest levels for any given year may be adjusted.

Subalpine fir and Douglas fir zones:

Strategy: Harvest as much at-risk and dead timber as is operationally and economically feasible and within the range of acceptability for all planning strategies, including lynx protection.

- Harvest approximately 20 million board feet per year (20 MMBF/yr) the first five years, and approximately 14 MMBF/year for the second 5 years.
- It is anticipated that about 7,200 acres of dead stands and 2,500 acres of at risk stands will be shelterwood harvested, and an additional 1,500 acres of at risk stands will be partial cut during the first five years. Approximately 5,300 acres of at risk stands will be shelterwood harvested, and an additional 6,000 acres of at risk stands will be selection harvested during the second five years of the first decade.

Ponderosa pine zone:

- Uneven-aged harvest approximately 250mbf/year on about 50 acres per year.

Sales will be designed to limit value losses from the mountain pine beetle by combining shelterwood harvest of dead or high at risk timber with partial cut harvesting of adjacent at risk stands (approximately 2-3mbf/acre removal of lodgepole pine > 8"s dbh). This strategy will allow for removing dead and at risk lodgepole in the most economical and operationally feasible manner. SNAP computer modeling will be updated as new information is available and re-run to assist in economical harvest scheduling.

Approximately 20,000 acres of lodgepole pine are currently classified as dead stands (where trees killed by the mountain pine beetle equal at least 40% of the stand); approximately 28,000 acres are at risk of infestation and some percentage of mortality within this decade. Harvests will also address mistletoe, root rot and other pest and disease problems as needed.

A variety of harvest unit sizes and numbers of leave trees will be used to accommodate native wildlife habitat conditions in all vegetation zones. Harvest unit and road design will incorporate established guidelines for all resources and site specific recommendations from department specialists as needed. Shelterwood unit sizes will vary depending on site specific conditions. Normally, they will not exceed 100 acres.

Because most harvest activity will take place in lynx habitat, harvest units will be located and scheduled to maintain a network of forested corridors on either side of at least 300 feet wide along identified travel routes involving key ridgetops, riparian areas and saddles. Timber harvesting will be designed to improve lynx forage habitat over time. Currently, there is a critical shortage of lynx forage habitat in all lynx analysis units. Adequate forest cover for lynx (not less than 180 trees per acre) will be maintained through selective harvests. Existing denning habitat will be maintained or created during harvest operations.

Expansion of the road network will be necessary to provide access for forest management and forest protection needs. New roads will be built in accordance with landscape plan wildlife guidelines and maintained or closed to preserve water quality and reduce wildlife disturbance. Potentially 65 miles of secondary roads, plus most of the 200 miles of new roads will be closed when no longer needed for management activities. New roads will be restricted to forest management entry only (general public will be able to enter with only non-motorized vehicles.)

Timber harvest will re-establish hydrologic maturity more quickly than timber stands that die naturally over time from mountain pine beetles. Section 4 identifies guidelines for harvesting that will reduce the chances of soil erosion and mass wasting to protect the soil, water and fish resources. Harvests will also reduce fuel loading and long-term fire potential.

Certain field foresters will be trained to identify archaeological/cultural sites to ensure a higher likelihood of protection as management activities occur. Funding will be sought for the Department to take a more proactive role in surveying for archaeological and historical sites.

Cattle grazing opportunities may increase as new harvest areas and roads increase available forage and mobility. A general increase in Animal Unit Months (AUMs) is not expected. Rather, there will be better dispersal and rotation of cattle. New guidelines for pasture rotation, stream protection, etc. will be implemented through the Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRM) process where appropriate and monitored for desired results. Increased emphasis on inventory of stream and range conditions has already started and will be continued to determine where restoration is needed.

Recreation opportunities such as driving for pleasure remain constant as existing primary roads continue to be open to historic use. There will be an increased number of gates on secondary roads for protection of wildlife and water quality, and to help control the spread of noxious weeds. Scenic guidelines may be developed, and a formal recreation survey conducted if funding is available.

Proposed mineral activity will be assessed on a case by case basis and subject to SEPA. As inventory work identifying key wildlife habitats, riparian areas, sensitive plant communities, etc. is conducted, a database can be created that will provide more certainty for benefit/costs analysis of any proposals.

A number of funding issues discovered during planning will be pursued during the first decade. Funding will be necessary to complete watershed analysis projects, recreation inventory and survey work, archaeological and historical survey work, an improved soil inventory, and an evaluation of mineral potential. Additionally, alternative sources of funding will be sought for recreation and grazing improvements.

The following two maps depict:

- 1) A conceptual display of areas of harvest activity and road development during Decade One of the Planning Period based on landscape planning assumptions and guidelines. This map is not intended to show actual harvest locations, harvest acres, road locations and road miles.
- 2) Age class distribution across the landscape at the end of Decade One based on conceptual harvest assumptions.